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RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000272

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM PHUM NI

SUBJECT: ELECTION PREPARATION: THE PAST AS PRELUDE

REF: A. ABUJA 06 2984

- 1B. ABUJA 06 2633
- 1C. ABUJA 06 3163
- 1D. ABUJA 06 3154

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Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The run-up to the 2007 elections in Nigeria has been marked by political acrimony, technical mismanagement and a generalized air of distrust. Lack of transparency in the overall process and competence in its technical implementation has resulted in a lack of confidence about the eventual conduct of the elections. Commissioner Iwu announced to the media on February 5 that the voters' register was currently available for inspection and would remain on display until February 10. Notwithstanding assurances to the Ambassador from the highest levels of the Nigerian government that the lists would be available as promised, Embassy has been unable to verify the display of the register in more than a handful of places, and our election partners who are closer to the grassroots report similar findings. With the end of the voters registration saga apparently complete, verification of the lists and documentation for prospective voters are still issues to be resolved. END SUMMARY.

VOTER'S REGISTRATION: THE DRAMA UNFOLDS

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12. (U) On October 25, 2006 INEC commenced a nationwide electronic voter registration exercise using Direct Data Capture (DDC) Machines. Acrimonious discussion at the National Assembly about Electronic Voting Systems (EVS) and the use of DDC machines ended when the Assembly outlawed EVS and INEC declared that it alone could decide how voter's would be registered. Soon it became apparent that actually obtaining the machines in sufficient quantity and in good working order would be a major undertaking. The major Canadian supplier who was supposed to provide 20,000 of the 44,000 machines backed out. Thus two weeks after the start of the registration exercise INEC revealed to the National Assembly that only 1,650 DDC machines were on ground and about 1% of eligible voters had registered (Ref A).

13. (C) Chairman Iwu has consistently assured the Ambassador that INEC is adequately funded, but by the end of December 2006, INEC had received only half of the 42 billion Naira budgeted for the elections, according to news reports. In response to widespread allegations that INEC was engaged in a

deliberate ploy to disenfranchise Nigerians, INEC explained that the Commission's planned activities were hampered by a lack of funds. They pointedly accused some parastatals of the federal government, especially the Due Process Office (a creation of the current administration) and the Central Bank, of sitting on INEC's financial allocations. Embassy sources and later newspaper reports said that INEC had been caught over billing for its equipment purchases (Ref B).

¶4. (C) When part of the money for the machines was released, the Commission was allegedly directed by the Presidency to award a major part of the contract for the procurement of the machines to Chris Uba, the younger brother of one of the President's closest aides, Andy Uba. Chris Uba was paid upfront and did not deliver the machines. Umar Ibrahim El-Yakub (ANPP), who discussed the alleged incident during a visit by Poloff to the National Assembly, credited INEC Chairman Iwu with recovering the money and finding an alternative supplier (Ref C).

¶5. (U) On December 20 INEC announced it had procured 20,000 laptop computers and that it planned to extend the voter registration exercise, although the Electoral Act stipulated it must end on December 14 (Ref D). The National Assembly dealt with the resulting legal uncertainty by passing an amendment to the Electoral Act. The House passed an extension before the recess in December 2006 and the Senate passed its version after the recess in January 2007. The two versions are yet to be reconciled, and allow legal cover for registration until February 14. The final bill must then be signed by the President. Newspaper articles have questioned whether INEC registration exercise could be vulnerable to a post-facto legal challenge.

#### FINALIZING VOTERS' REGISTRATION

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¶6. (U) According to newspaper reports, on November 22 INEC announced that it had registered a total of 2 million voters; on Nov 25, 3.5 million; on December 9, 10.1 million; December 20, 20 million, January 12, 40 million, January 19, 43 million, January 20, 53 million and on February 6 INEC announced it had registered a grand total of 55 million voters. The final tally, now at 57 million voters, continues to climb as the concluded tabulation is finalized.

¶7. (C) After stating it had successfully completed the registration exercise, INEC announced on February 5 that it had started displaying the voters' register and that it would be available until February 10. Voters would have an opportunity to confirm their names on the list, and where necessary, seek redress. Chief Information Officer of INEC, Andy Ezeani, was unable to tell us any locations where the register was on display when we contacted him on February 5. Embassy contacts at UNDP, IRI, NDI, and numerous Nigerian NGOs had trouble finding the lists anywhere in the country until February 9, when the list was found on display in several places in Abuja. A Zamfara state government official on February 9 told Poloff that the lists would go on display in the North Central States of Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara and Katsina on February 9 in the afternoon "at certain government locations." Polcouns traveled to Anambra, Enugu, Benue and Kogi states and had no luck finding voters lists, and knowledgeable officials at state and national elections offices were unsure of the location to verify displays. An IFES representative told Poloff that INEC officials told him that voter's cards would also be given out during this verification exercise.

¶8. (C) Inyakwe Nsirmovu, head of an NGO network based in Port Harcourt that works with NDI on election monitoring, told Poloff that his monitors had been unable to find voters lists on display anywhere in Rivers, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom states,

and that he expected the same was true in other Niger Delta states that his group was monitoring. He said he personally went to the Rivers state election commissioner in Port Harcourt to inquire about the list, but the commissioner could not provide a single site for him to verify. "I believe INEC made the announcement for the benefit of the international community," Nsirmovu said.

¶ 9. (C) During a contentious meeting in Abuja between a visiting EU delegation and Chairman Iwu on February 7, the question of the voters register being on view was raised. The answer given to the delegation by Iwu, according to a UNDP staffer who sat in the meeting, was that INEC was late getting the lists out around the country, and that when the lists were displayed on February 7, no voters showed up. The delegation was dissatisfied with two additional issues: the status of election observers, about which there was no clarity, and an apparent lack of willingness to cooperate about payment of ad-hoc election staff, which the EU had promised to cover, but only with strict financial oversight.

¶ 10. (C) Comment: At the conclusion of the voter registration exercise there were few surprises in terms of numbers of registered voters, according to INEC figures. The verification of the list remains outstanding and, notwithstanding assurances to the Ambassador from the highest levels of the Nigerian government that the lists would be available, Embassy has been unable to verify the display of the register in more than a handful of places. Our election partners, who are closer to the grassroots, report similar findings. The failure to display the voters' roll as promised has been met with a shrug in the Nigerian media, which has instead focused on the latest personality-driven political twists and turns as Nigeria gears up for elections in April.

CAMPBELL